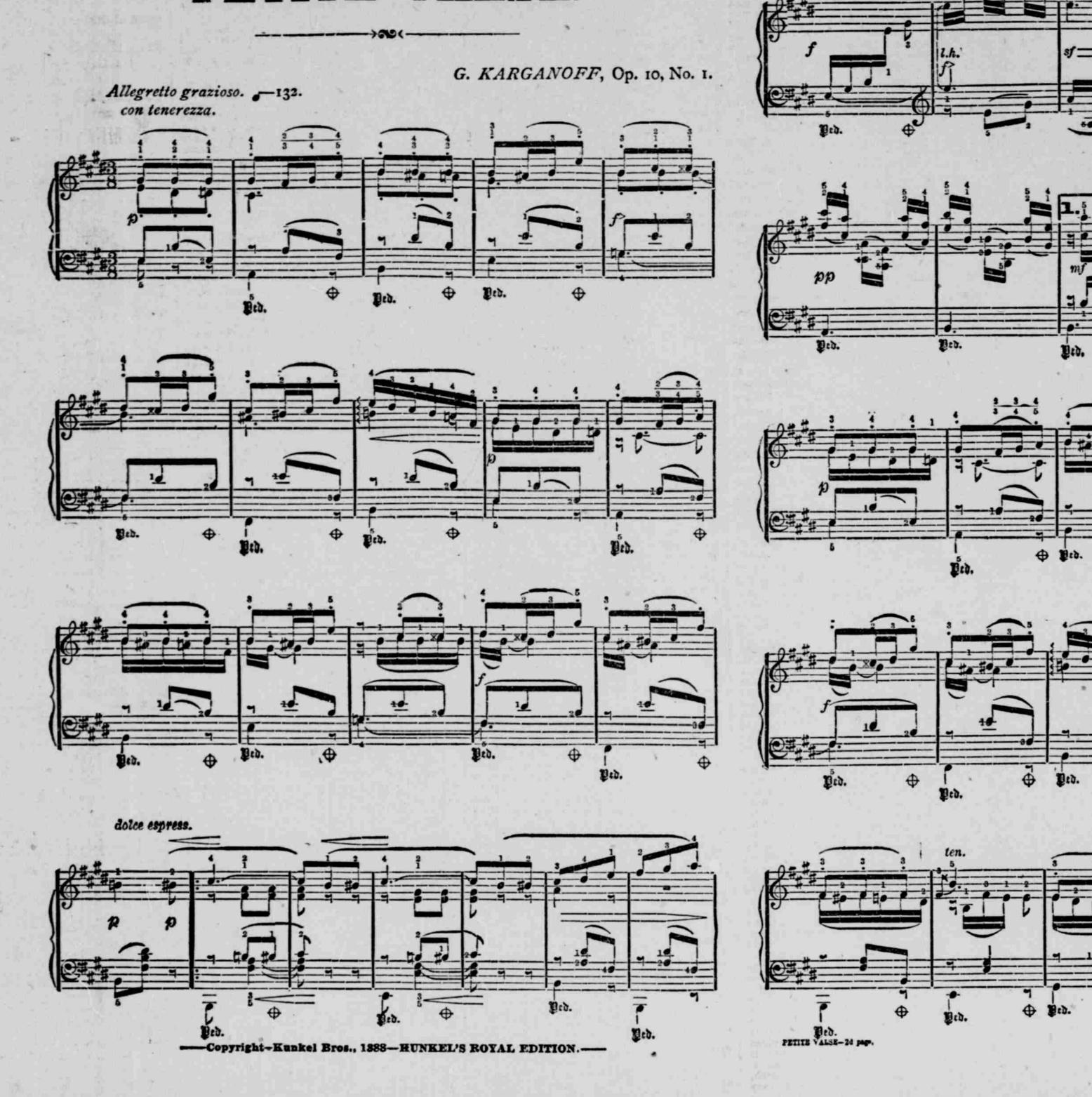
PRTITE VALSE.



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BY JOHN NITCHIO. AUTHOR OF "THE PAWNED CHARACTER," "DOUBLE

SIXES," ETC.

He shivered as he looked into the window. crowded with a motley collection of old trinkets, revolvers, fiddles, miniatures and musty books, upon which one puny gas jet cast a faint light. His breath congealed into a misty film on the pane, and the picturesque heap of rubbish within gradually faded from sight. The wind drove the sleet and snow down the half-deserted street in wild gusts; in cruel delight it snatched the poor fellow's misshapen hat, and when he clapped his hands to his head took occasion to blow up under his buttonless coat with a frigid gust that made his teeth chatter and rattele like a telegraph instrument in a He entry-way to protection from the increasing storm. As he leaned against the door, drawing himself as far back as possible, the weak catch gave way with a click, the door flew open and he staggered fback into the shop. The door struck the warning bell above it with a crash and set it ringing and jangling at a terrific rate. There was a sort of wail in its tone, it seemed to him; the clanging, tolling sound filled the place and echoed and re-schood among the dusty piles of cast-off stuff of every description. The strange, doleful clang of the vibrating bell seemed to be repeating the words written over the gate of Dante's Hell: "All hope abandon ye who enter in-" "All hope abandon, ye who enter in-" over and over with monotonous wailing iteration, fainter and fainter, like the cry of a falling spirit. The storm outside sounded cheerful beside this demoniac clanger, and he started toward the door again, when some curtains at the back of the shop parted and a voice said, with a peculiar ac-

"Good evening, sir." He turned and saw in the dim light a little bent form advancing. There was something fascinating in the soft tones of the voice and the gleam of the eyes, the only feature of the face clearly discernible. The little man closed the door. He could now see that the pawn-broker had a heavy black beard, fine olive skin, shapely aquiline nose, with thin nostrils, showing quick susceptibilities; on his head was a dark purple skull cap, from which his hair came out behind In thick, glossy waves; he was short, and seemed deformed, though he was not hump-backed.

The little man motioned to his visitor to follow him, and led the way toward the back room. The pawn-broker pulled back the curtain, while a smile crept over his face, a strange smile, in which there was no suggestion of merriment or good feeling. It was only the cold, muscular, soulless image of the real thing. Darby thought when he saw it of the words the clanging bell seemed to repeat - "All hope abandon ye who enter in." The warmth and coziness of the little room at once banished all such thoughts from his mind. It was a luxprions study, furnished with a richness and taste that startled one, coming in from the dingy, dirty confusion of the shop. An open fire burned in the fire-place, the tiles of which represented what might have been sections of Michael Angelo's Last Judgment, or kints from it: while the brass andirons supported the heads of grinning monsters, whose faces twitched in the play of shadows. One side of the room was a great three-paneled screen, of which the fireplace formed the central section, with the two wings turned outward, cutting off the sharp corners on that side. Along the opposite wall were several book-shelves containing volumes in dark leather, with here and there a vellum cover or ancient sheepskin; in front of the shelves were amber-colored curtains partially drawn back. Above one of the book-cases stood a copy of the Laoco in marble. Darby thought he had never before seen such a marvelous miniature of this antique masterpiece; while over the mantel was an exquisitely handled engraving of Leonardo da Vinci's Medusa, that made the visitor start and shudder as he saw the writhing snakes above the horrible trunkless head. The carpet was thick and soft, of dark rich harmonizing colors; slong one of the sloping walls next the fireplace was an inviting divan covered with a Persian rug, and corresponding to it on the other side was a great easy chair placed before a tall ma-

could not determine. In the center of the room was a small writing table; a chair stood near it, pushed back as if the occupant had risen in haste, and upon the table were some papers and a small polished skull mounted on an onyx slab, in the top of which was set an ink well, rimmed with gold. A soft light from the tinted globes of the chandelier fell over everything, and enhanced the oriental warmth and beauty of the

odd little room. Darby looked down on his wretched, tattered clothes, soiled with dust and mud, and wet with snow and rain, and hesitated to sit down on the rich divan, as directed by a gesture of his host. But he threw aside his scruples, and sat down on the end near the fire; the warmth thawed out his mind as well as his body. As the feeling of intense physical discomfort disappeared his thoughts became clearer, and the sense of subjective personality sharper; a crushed and almost lifeless sense of shame stirred within him. Such comfort and luxury had once been his, now gone through his own weakness and wickedness. He sank back on the cushions of the divan, and with a start awoke from his momentary fit of abstraction to find the pawn-broker looking at him sharply with a sinister smile on his face; he seemed to have been following the unspoken train of thought that ran through Darby's mind, and to be smiling at the final little flicker of regret as an exhibition of weak-

Darby was astonished to note the apparent change in the pawnbroker's appearance. The face and dress were the same, but the figure was taller and straighter. He now noted the high forehead and the intellectual cast of the clear-cut features, expressive, yet cold and almost immobile. The man stood gazing intently at him, with one hand resting on the table. There was something inscrutable about this mysterious pawnbroker, who lived in schol-

arly elegance. The pawnbroker picked up from the table a well-thumbed old volume with metal clasps and

opened it. "I read in the Mosllakat," he said in the purest English, though with a certain indefinite intonation that suggested a foreign and perhaps oriental nativity, "these lines." He read in the original from the book he held in his hand. "Interpreted they mean: 'Look not upon the beauty of the cup, which may deceive the senses, but cast thine eyes within and learn whether it contains water or wine.' I have looked within and I find wine, though it be but dregs. Yet, you know, the last drops contain more of the inherent essence than the first draught. Therefore I take you in. The cup is battered, but there is

metal in it yet." A silence fell upon the room, and Darby now for the first time perceived the faint ticking of a clock in the apartment, but he could not determine its location. He slunk from the penetrating gaze of the pawnbroker. Then asudden flood of self-assertion swept across his consciousness --- a faint burst of flame from the smoldering and dying fires of manhood. He sprang to his feet with a passionate, energetic motion; his gaze met unflinchingly the magnetic gleam of

the old man's eyes. "Speak no riddles to me," he cried, flercely, "I am as I am. I would not be otherwise. What do I care for the world, when I am to die tonight, to leave its painted pleasures, its deceitful shows, its disappointments. I know it is as we make it, and I have made it so. With one blow or one leap I can destroy the hated picture -make the world vanish into nothingness and leave no traces behind. The blow that kills me erases history and blots out time. It is all a phantom, conceived of a brain whose inevitable capability to draw the lines so or so is prescribed by we know not whom-kill the brain and the phantom is gone. Why talk of others-you are me and all the world is me-this tortured head contains the universe, which is to be anuffed out to-night. I shall kill it ail!"

His voice rose to a shriek as we went on, and his eyes took on a wilder look, but the man still looked at him cold and immovable. "Sit down, my dear sir," said the pawnbroker

at last, in his soothing, musical voice. "That portion of you, which is I, may be able to restore the blurred and meaningless picture to its former beauty-life and the world may yet look bright to you, I am the friend of many tempest-tossed souls, as well as many starving bodies. For the battered wreckage of a household I give the means of warmth and nourishment; for the remnants of a foundering soul-"

The sharp clanger of a bell in the shop cut short the words just as the old man's voice had fallen to an ominous whisper. He stepped to the curtained door, and Darby sank back on the | the vial from the table restored it to the cabidivan. The pawnbroker stepped into the dingy op and for a moment Darby was left alone in the strange little room. The unseen clock ticked louder and louder; a faint murmur of voices, one that of a woman, but hoarse and lous came from the shop; and he could just caten the far-off whirl and rush of the storm outside. A moment more and the curtain was roughly pulled aside, and a bedraggled woman pushed into the room. Her profile was visible an instant, and then Darby turned away with a smothered exclamation; be bent forward and covered his face with his hands.

clothes, Moloch, though this would be a bad night to be turned away without a rag-but don't take his-

"Draw up to the fire, madame, and warm yourself—I charge you nothing." "This is cozy, Moloch," she said in a voice of less bravado; "it reminds me of—" she stopped and looked at Darby more closely, "of another room. These two cursed rooms have been the death of me—they took from me first, honor. and then hope. You needn't squirm, Moloch, I shan't moralize any more. Your friend here seems uncomfortable, too."

Darby sprang to his feet and stared at her. "My God! Walter Darby!" she exclaimed. "You here?" For a moment she was struck dumb. "You are in his clutches, are you? It is a just reward. To you I owe all that I am, a creature of the street-a bedraggled outcast, a soulless, homeless, shameless thing."

"She snatched up the tattered shawl that had fallen from ber shoulders, and rushed through the curtained doorway; the bell above the door jangled as she went out into the stormy street. Darby stood for a moment petrified with shame and amazement. Then he started after her. The pawnbroker had smiled in a sinister way at the woman's words; now the smile faded, and with a stern, commanding face he barred the

"Sit down," he said. "That foolish girl led you to ruin once. Why should you follow her again? Every woman works out her own dis-

grace or giory. Darby sank back again on the divan and buried his face in his hands. He thought how that woman had looked that night when, mad with love, she came to his rooms, how his own weak and passionate nature had given way to the temptation, then he remembered that he had tried to recover himself, he had loved a pure young girl, but his wild ways were against him; she married a cold, persistent, indomitable fellow whom he hated for his very nature; picture after picture and face after face passed before him. He forgot the little room with its warmth and color, and the old keen-eyed pawnbroker with the purple cap. All consciousness was resolved into memory-old friends, old happiness, old-hush! and the soft voice of the pawnbroker broke the thread, the realties of a moment before faded into misty shades and disappeared-be saw only the inscrutable, deep, glowing eyes of his com-

"You dream, sir," said he, as if again he had known what was passing in Darby's mind. can bring back those dreams-I. can make life sweet again, make it glowing, passionate, real and livable for you.' "But I have nothing," exclaimed Darby.

"Why do you torture me with these vague promises! "Ab, that is easily managed," said the pawnbroker. "I ask but little-nothing you have any immediate use for--------- and he bent over Darby and whispered a word or two in his ear; the visitor started and looked into the glowing eyes that were fixed upon him. "Here is this cabinet," he said, pointing to the heavy carven case beside the arm-chair, "it will be in good company. You can live untrammeled

by troublesome thoughts.' Darby felt his power of volition and action gradually weaken; vague, pleasant thoughts flitted across his mind. His brain was drowsy; a sharp spasm of will-energy shot across his consciousness as if another's hand had plunged a pin into his body and he had been a roused in-

"All right," he said, 'it is a bargain." As the pawnbroker rose to his feet D arby fell into a deeper reverie that became a dream-a series of dreams-in which were pictured the wild joys and pleasures of the renewed existence promised him, the loves of beautiful women, the companionship of gray men, all the old reckless life came up before him more vivdly than we would care to picture.

The lights in the room had been gradually turned down. The old man opened the mysterious cabinet and took from a little compartment a vial of peculiar shape, resembling a heart, and a round curiously mark ed piece of metal; the case when opened shows da hundred or more such little square compartments, in each of which stood a similarly shaped vial. The lights burned lower; the fire war a mass of black-baked coals, from which a thin blue flame occasionally leaped up, but its subdued glow only illuminated the room sufficiently to show the tail form of the pawnbroker moving hither, and thither, from the motionless form on the divan to the table, back and forth. At length he stopped, and taking up net. He sat down in the arm-chair and appeared to be wrapped in thought. Still Darby slept on without a motion or a sound. Finally the man turned up the lights e,gain; the little room was flooded with the tin'te I light. Darby turned uneasily under the giare, and in a few minutes opened his eys. He lay for a minute and stared about the room. The pawnbroker pointed to a little pile of green backs on the table, on top of which lay the small round piece of metal which he had taken from the cabinet. Darby rose to his feet. "That is for the first quarter," said the pawn-

years. Every three months you can, by bringing me back that piece of metal receive a similar sum, which is more than sufficient to make life full of ease and pleasure. At the end of ten yers you can have your soul back again," he smiled evilly, 'provided you come for it. But you must present the pledge in person. I re-member," he went on, with a demoniac pleasure in the train of talk, "one fellow, whose time expired the night before he was hanged. He sent by one of the jailers asking me to return his soul before it was too late. I was sorry not to be able to accommodate him. He tried to say something about me on the gallows, but his talk was so wild that they slipped the cap over his head and shut it off. Ten years may not seem long to you, perhaps, but very few ever claim

their property again. Darby was surprised at the coolness with which he received these cold-blooded words. He picked up the bills, counted them over and slipped the metal ticket into his pocket. A wild delight at the ability to return to his old pleasure filled bis breast; together with a feeling of fiendish freedom from restraint-an exultation in the ability to live, to live as he wished, to feed the passion dulled by poverty and want. He threw off the cowed aspect that had marked his disgrace. He looked a moment into the glowing, exultant eyes of the pawnbroker; then his glance caught the flitting leer in the brazen faces of the andirons, and lingered for an instant in the writhing snakes of the Mednas. He turned and without a word tore aside the curtain and strode through the dim rubbish-piled shop. The pawnbroker called, "Good evening," after him in a mocking voice. The door clashed and the bell jangled behind him as he stepped out into the storm. The storm still drove down the deserted street, though with less fury than before. But Darby did not mind it. He delighted in it. It seemed as if its recklessness was the outward counterpart of his inner freedom. He felt as if every evil passion were unchanged and longed for expression, and he almost shouted as he fingered the money in his pocket. He saw a policeman half dozing in an entry and he felt a wild desire to kill him, he knew not why.

At length Darby turned into a side street. In most of the houses the curtains were drawn, but he passed one with uncovered lighted windows. A whim led him to stop and mount the steps. Leaning far over he could just peep in. In the back parlor a woman sat evidently reading aloud to two children, one sitting on her lap the other at her feet on a little stool. The eager expressive faces were turned intently toward their mother. One of them started, possibly having seen his face at the window, and when the woman's face was raised the lamplight fell full upon it. "My God!" exclaimed Darby as he drew back on the steps. "Elise! Strange I should have happened on her too. The two women who made my life what it is.'

He ran down the steps; hate, bitterness and passion once more filled his heart. If things had been different she might have been his wife. and those his children. He rushed on wildly, driven by his own fierce thoughts. He cursed the man! who had robbed him of the only woman he ever loved. For a moment the money in his pocket was forgotten. Again he was an outcast, penniless, wretched, the hopeless bearer of a useless and degraded life. He felt the blood rush flercely in his veins, as the venomous and passionate thoughts swarmed in his brain. A sudden light fell across his eyes and brought him back from his bitter reverie to the consciousness of his present surroundings. He was just passing under a street lamp, and the narrow circle of lighted space was filled with whirling flakes of snow that dashed across and out into the darkness again. Darby heard footsteps down the street; a man's form came into sight; as he drew near Darby saw his face, where the light fell upon it, while his own was in a shadow. A sudden resolve, borne of his bitter thoughts and evil passions, took possession of him. The man passed him; as soon as he passed the ismp-post, Darby turned and ran after him. "Oh, sir!" he cried, with half bowed head and

abject voice. "take pity on a homeless man. Give me a little for a night's lodging!" The man half stopped and looked sharply on the shrinking figure by his side. They were out of range of the light; the snow fell fast; not a sound to be heard or a person in sight; they were alone in the midst of the storm and the night. The cringing form suddenly lifted itself

"I know you, Mr. Howard Berkely, if you do fail to recognize me. I don't want your money." cried Darby. "I have plenty." and he pulled out the roll of bills and shook them in the man's face. "I would not touch your cursed money. Do you suppose that could pay for what you stole from me years ago? Yes, you stole itstole it--" Darby's voice rose in a shrick above the howling of the wind. "Elise's girlish love for me! There is but one hing can pay me | to look at the face; it was haggard, and the now-but one thing-"

Like a flash Darby bad spr his ciutching fingers were at

Im tone, "if

"Darby," began the man

the strength of ten into his hands. They fell together struggling to the ground and rolled over and over on the pavement. Neither ut-tered a sound. To and fro they writhed in fierce encounter. A cheking, indescribable throat-noise was barely audible for a moment. Then Darby rose to a sitting posture on the body of his antagonist, with his hands still griping at the man's throat. The body under him gradually ceased its etruggles, and became limp and lifeless. Darby dragged it across the sidewalk, down into the sheltered basement doorway under the steps of one of the houses. He turned to go away, when a sudden fierce impulse seized him, and he whirled about, pulled a knife from his pocket, dropped swiftly onto his knees and plunged it again and again into the motionless body. Then he walked up the basement steps and out into the storm again, with a wild feeling of exultation in his heart; the last flickering impulse for good seemed stifled and every evil passion ran riot within him. Schemes of wickedness flashed unsought into his mind, and in an instant took definite shape; his hands were ready for demoniac crimes, seeking no end but the accomplishment of evil; he reveled in these pictures of imagined malice and lust. He felt in his pocket for the money the nawnbroker had given him. It was safe. but something was missing in the pocket-a flash of remembrance! The metal pawn ticket was gone! He stood a moment irresolute. Then the horror of his situation came over him -the helpless instrument of his own malicious and evil impulses! What was to become of him? Was he to go unchecked from crime to crime, to be dragged by his own evil propensities to prison and the gallows! His wildly responsive imagination pictured bimself upon the fatal stand, the crowd of upturned faces, the noose, then the black cap over his head, the

choking rope about his neck, the falling down, the borrible upward jerk of the taut rope-the choking, smothering-oh! where was the ticket! He had lost it-it must be found. He must get back his soul once more. He ran back through the storm. Perhaps he had dropped it in the struggle. He crawled on his bands and knees around the fatal spotback and forth, around and around-it was not there. He crept down the basement steps. His hand touched the dead face as he felt about; it was cold, and the snow that had blown in upon it was not melted. As he explored the body his bands came in contact with a soft, sticky substance; it was congealed blood. He drew back for a moment, but he thought he had felt something hard, and he returned to the search. Yes, at last! he drew the metal out of the hardening pool of blood which had formed on the dead

Now that it was in his possession once more, Darby did not hesitate. Back he raced up the street, around the corner and down toward the pawn-broker's shop. He staggered panting against the door. It was locked and the lights were out. He rattled the door fiercely and kicked it in angry haste. At length he saw a glimmer of light through one of the frost-covered panes. The door opened and a voice asked

what was wanted. "Never mind, let me in!" said Darby, and pushed violently against it, but a shut-guard chain within held it firmly and he could push it back no farther. This angered him. "I want my soul back again," he shouted,

"and I will have it." The pawn-broker laughed scornfully. "Back so soon? No, my friend, a bargain is a

With a strength that he would not have been

credited with, the man, in spite of Darby's exertions, pushed the door to and locked it. The dim light within faded and disappeared. For a moment Darby was confounded. Then his rage broke out in curses; he threw the metal pawn-ticket flercely at the closed door. It struck a piece of tin inserted in the place of a broken glass and bounded back on the sidewalk. The sound brought him to his senses. He realized that on the possession of the bit of metal depended his hopes of a care-free, reckless life.

He groped about till he found it.

Further down the street he turned into a low concert saloon that was still in tull blast. The ticket-seller looked in surprise from Darby's bedraggled dress to the roil of bills which he pulled from his pocker, but said nothing. In the main ball a showily dressed and painted woman was just beginning a coarse song. It might have been a week later, or perhaps more, that the pawn-broker on opening the door of his shop early one morning, found the figure of a man lying on the steps. He looked up and down the street; no one was in sight. He gently

shook the body; it was stiff and cold, frozen to death. The pawn-broker deftly went through the pockets; not a thing did he find of value, money, watch, everything was gone, and yet the man was in evening dress. He turned the body over staring eyes were bloodshot; everything indicated that this was the result of a reckiess course of persistent dissipation. A flash of recognition came across the pawnbroker's face as he looked again.

hand. He pried the fingers open. It was a metal disc, badly marked. "It is one of them, at any rate," muttered the pawnbroker, as he went in and locked the door behind him. Passing on into the chamber in the rear, he opened the great cabinet, took out a vial, and closely observed the markings on one

side of it. "The same," he murmured. "He was so changed, though. That was quick work!" And

he smiled to himself. He took the cork from the vial and placed it in a salver on the table. Instantly the room grew dark, as if filled with a grey cloud; a flash or two of light shot across the midst of the darkness; a far-off dying wail seemed to come from an infinite distance; slowly the room grew lighter, the pawnbroker sank back into the easy chair and gazed into the smoldering fire.

In front of the shop door two policemen were bending over the dead body of a man in a dress-

Women in Utah. St. Paul Daily Globe. The first question saked by the stranger in Salt Lake City is this, says a Salt Lake City letter: "Do the Mormons still practice polygamy?" They claim that they do not, but their asseverations are taken cum grano salis by the gentiles there. The Edmunds bill disfranchises women living in polygamy and fines the men \$300, with imprisonment for six months. The women are "allowed"-compelled would be a more appropriate term-"to testify against their husbands." Despite this it is extremely difficult to secure convictions. A woman is called on the witness-stand, and a colleguy something like this occurs:

"Are you married?" "I do not know, sir." "Is not the defendant your husband under

the Mormon law?" "I cannot say, sir." "Is this your child?"-showing an infact of

two or three months old. "Yes, sir."

"Who is the father?" "I cannot say, sir."

This is no uncommon occurence, the attornys tell me. And, after all, one can scarcely blame the women for testifying thus if they believe in the "divine sanction of polygamy" as taught by the church. No less celebrated a lawyer than the late Jere S. Black has said: "To compel busband and wife to testify against each other is to change every rule of evidence; a contemptuous defiance of the great principles which protect the sanctity of the family and lie at the basis of civil society."

Spendthrifts at the Beach.

Atlantic City Letter in Philadelphia Times. There are half a dozen young men in Atlantic City who are spending money as freely as water. Their lives will probably point a moral before the ides of another summer. There are many Philadelphians who recall the sunny ways of Jimmy Henderson, who lived so lavishly here a year or so ago. His fine horses and open purse were the property of every one to whom he took a fancy. There are many Wall-street men who remember the genial, wealthy George Haddon Palmer, who killed himself in a lonely marsh. He had an office within a few yards of the old stamping-ground of Jay Gould. Palmer made a fortune, his customers comprising some of New York's great lawyers and club men with speculative tendencies. His prosperity led him to rapid habits. At times he would disappear for a month and reappear in rags. Personally one of the nattiest men of the street, he was a sight to behold after one of his disappearances. He would resume his fine manpers and courteous bearing, and everything would be levely for many months. He always came to Atlantic City when these sprees seized him and spent a fortune here, and at the expiration of one of them went home and killed himself. The statement is made as a warning to a balf dozen popular and wealthy young Philadelphtans who are here on the same road, seeking its terminus as soon as possible. The bill of a livery-stable man against one of them for last week's driving amounted to over \$300.

A Successful Way to Put It.

Harper's Bazar. "No. Mr. Smith," she said gently but firmly. "I can never be your wife." Then he struggled to his feet and said, in broken tones: "Are all my hopes to be thus dashed to pieces! Am I never to be known as the husband of the beautiful Mrs. Smith?"

It May Come to This. Youth-I've got some poetry here I'd like to

This was too much for the girl, and she suc-

have you look over. Editor-Yes, sir. Have you got your license with you! Youth-My license? ee: your poet's license.